

CLASSIC DRIVER

Big business: Five of our favourite LWBs

Lead

When there's not enough space in a standard saloon, the answer is simple. Stretch it. By lengthening the wheelbase of the S-Class and its contemporaries, car-makers can release enough room to allow for real luxury in the interior...

In the early 1990s, many of the 'luxury' marques offered long-wheelbase versions of their flagship saloons to seduce the men of big business (as well as big businessmen) into the rear seats of their cars. The LWB models ranged from chauffeur-centric limousines, to large, long cars that were spectacularly good to drive. We pick five of our favourites.

Mercedes-Benz S 600 Pullman: Big business



From the very first glance, it's obvious that Mercedes meant the S 600 Pullman to be a chauffeur-driven limousine. With an overall length of 6.21 metres, it's hardly something that entices you to leap into the driving seat, but the four-door giants from Stuttgart were the ultimate in spacious on-road luxury for businessmen, politicians or royalty. Just 428 LWB versions of the 600 were built between 1963 and 1981, all of them highly individualised, with bullet-proof glass just one of the options.

BMW L7: Long series



At BMW, the 'L7' was the name given to a rare, long-wheelbase, European limousine, available as either a 4.4-litre V8 or a 5.4-litre V12. Although still an ideal car for chauffeur-driven executives, it also beckoned to driving enthusiasts, offering pleasure behind the wheel as well as in the back seats. Of course it did: it's a BMW.

Audi V8 LWB: Failed despite its size



Convinced of the competitiveness of its own product, Audi tried a lengthened version of the V8. As it happened, the space for rear passengers in the

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standard Audi V8 was so modest that a long-wheelbase version was almost essential if one were to go on holiday four-up. But apparently only a few V8 drivers had the desire to do so - or perhaps they simply found the LWB V8 too expensive. Today, the long-wheelbase version is so rare that any examples on sale tend to be rapidly snapped up.

Bentley Brooklands LWB: Business as usual



The situation at Bentley was rather different from that at Audi. Even in 'short wheelbase' form, as introduced to the market in 1993, the Bentley Brooklands was 5.27m long and roomily spacious in the rear. An LWB version of the car, at 5.38m in overall length, gave even more opulent dimensions - that arguably weren't necessary.

Porsche 911 LWB: Business unusual



Extending the wheelbase of a car has a dramatic effect on the dynamics, which is perhaps why Porsche decided against a mass production of an extended 911 and left it to Dr. William Dick, a Porsche dealer in Texas, to build this four-door 911 as a Christmas present for his wife in 1967. It probably didn't drive all that well (compared with a standard 911, that is), but on the long, straight roads around Texas, perhaps that didn't matter too much.

Photos: Audi, Bentley, BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Porsche

Gallery

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